

The Black Shoals Dossier

by Tiffany Lethabo King, Stephanie Latty, Stephanie Lumsden, Karyn Recollet and Megan Scribe and edited by Beenash Jafri

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ABSTRACT This dossier collects four reflections on *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (2019) with responses by its author Tiffany Lethabo King. This dossier is based on an American Studies Association 2021 roundtable organized by Beenash Jafri.

KEYWORDS Black studies, diaspora, collaboration, Native studies, decolonial, Octavia Butler, erotics, Indigenous studies, freedom

Editor's Note

by Beenash Jafri

Tiffany Lethabo King's field-changing 2019 monograph, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, made its mark long before it hit the bookshelves. For several years prior to the book's publication, King's work had already generated field-changing conversations across not only Black and Native studies, but in adjacent interdisciplines across ethnic, gender, American and cultural studies; to give but one example, her 2013 dissertation has been cited over 100 times. Unhinging the epistemological and ontological presumptions of settler colonial studies, *The Black Shoals* unapologetically refuses dominant registers of academic knowledge production and maps alternate Black and Native feminist cartographies of being, living, and belonging.

In this dossier, Karyn Recollet < <https://csalateral.org/issue/12-1/black-shoals-dossier#recollet> >, Stephanie Lumsden < <https://csalateral.org/issue/12-1/black-shoals-dossier#lumsden> >, < <https://csalateral.org/issue/12-1/black-shoals-dossier#recollet> > Stephanie Latty < <https://csalateral.org/issue/12-1/black-shoals-dossier#latty> >, and Megan Scribe < <https://csalateral.org/issue/12-1/black-shoals-dossier#scribe> > reflect on the significance of *The Black Shoals* for their own work. The breadth and depth of each essay speaks not only to the generative force that King's book has inspired, but that King herself inspires for so many of us as a scholar doing transformative work under the

pressures of the neoliberal academy's violence. On a personal note: thank you, Tiffany, for your brilliance, care, and generosity across many years. I am continually learning from the poethics you model.¹

This dossier inaugurates a new occasional series connected to Lateral's book reviews that provides a space for in-depth engagement with new books in cultural studies. *The Black Shoals* was reviewed by Laura Goldblatt < <https://csalateral.org/reviews/black-shoals-offshore-formations-black-native-studies-king-goldblatt/>> in *Lateral* 9.2 (2020).

Where We Intend to Meet after the "Turn"

by Tiffany Lethabo King

When I think about the force of land, land as a form of relation, and relations between Indigenous feminisms and Black feminisms, I think about my hike in 2014 through the Rio Preto's dry riverbed in the ancestral homelands of the Puri (State of Bahia, Brazil). This hike across the seasonally dry riverbeds of Rio Preto is a story that I tell over and over again. It is just one of my land—or thinking with Karyn Recollet—landing stories.

During the river's dry season, visitors to the Vale do Capao often head to the river to hike across its rocky terrain and bathe in some of the pools of rain that make for good swimming holes. The day that I went for a hike with friends, I struggled. I was fatigued through most of the hike and feared that my unsteady steps would cause me to slip and fall on the wet rocks. I feared for my safety.

However, my fear did not overtake me. Another feeling prevailed. A new kind of calibration and attunement emerged and made itself available to me. To make it through the hike safely, I had to switch my attention from matching the steps of my friends and guides and feel the flow and footing that the rocks provided for me. As I trusted and flowed, I noticed that there was always a rock, an edge of a rock, a small sandy spot or a groove that welcomed each foot. Other possibilities, peculiar and unexpected angles, new grooves, and continual openings were the current and language of relation on the riverbed.

Dry riverbeds often have a subterranean current flowing beneath them. A pulse and energy are present and can be felt even if you cannot always see water. Feeling and thinking with the words of Stephanie Lumsden (Hupa), Karyn Recollet (diasporic Cree), Stephanie Latty (Black), and Megan Scribe (Ininiw iskwew/Norway House Cree Nation), allows me to experience the force of what I think of (and know) as the subterranean rivers of Indigenous and Black feminist relations. It is a visible and invisible relational space that is old as African and Indigenous encounters in the Americas (including Black Indigeneity). In fact, our

meeting spaces and solidarity work often meet up at riverbanks, as have the Sacred Waters Pilgrimage that started after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. The Sacred Waters Pilgrimage is a mobile Black, Native, Two-Spirit and femme people space of meeting, praying, and healing that moves up and down the banks of the Mississippi River from Minneapolis to New Orleans.

My own engagements with Karyn, Stephanie, Stephanie, and Megan can be described as returns to some familiar spots on shared riverbeds that we made out of stolen moments at academic conferences and meetings. While our formal gathering that marks the occasion of this special dossier took place in 2021 during a virtual panel of the American Studies Association conference, I have met, talked with, and been lovingly pushed and pulled by each of them into a form of generative relation across several spaces and geographies on Turtle Island. I am grateful for their desire to be in relationship with me again. For my entire academic career, I have longed to be in relationship with Indigenous feminist scholars. I think there is something particular and peculiar about the kind of company that we keep with each other as folks marked as domestic enemies by the U.S. and Canadian nation-states. And perhaps specifically because of the ways that our meetings kindle undesirable political possibilities, it is hard to find safe gathering spaces. Over the years, I have struggled to find academic spaces free of interlopers, saboteurs, and institutional blockades.

Even when the academy finds it convenient to engage the "Black and Indigenous Studies turn," it is done with violence. So often the curatorial practices of non-Black and non-Indigenous scholars that attempt to stage a meeting between Black and Indigenous peoples (and the fields) are structured by an impulse to discipline, block, capture, and contain what is possible and potentially transformative (unsettling) about Black and Indigenous relation. Over the years, I have witnessed non-Black and non-Indigenous scholars demand that a Black and Indigenous gathering and or agenda give an account of non Black and non Indigenous positionality or use a language that speaks to their role in the relationship. While the language(s) of Black and Indigenous relations are not exclusive, the relation and it's grammars, idioms, and syntax are particular. So much of what the five of us (Latty, Lumsden, Recollet, Scribe, and King) are deeply meditating on in this space are the kinds of language, kinetics/falling, dreaming, erotic risk-taking and postures of feminist and queer care that we might craft with and for each other. Drawing inspiration from the recent expressions of queer feminist Black and Indigenous care demonstrated by Robyn Maynard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in *Rehearsals for Living*,² I write directly to Karyn Recollet, Stephanie Lumsden, Stephanie Latty, and Megan Scribe.

Finally, Dear Beenash, thank you for organizing the American Studies Association roundtable on *The Black Shoals* and facilitating a continuation of the discussion here in

Lateral. You have moved with a deep ethics of care that has flowed with our river.

A Tesseract as a Processual Space of Becomingness

by Karyn Recollet

Dear reader, in the following words I think alongside King's beautiful, generous and capacious writing in relation with Charmaine Lurch and in doing so, I witness and build upon a series of ethical and relational landing practices that gather us into relation. I appreciate the intimacy, and gentle ways of thinking, and creating with each other as we shape liberatory atmospherics through the co-constitution of future re-worlding.

In chapter five of *The Black Shoals*, Tiffany Lethabo King walks us through conversations with artist Charmaine Lurch's *Revisiting Sycorax*³ to describe the ways that Lurch sculpts towards the space of Katherine McKittrick's thinking with Sylvia Wynters' concept of the demonic, as a non-deterministic model to make possible a different kind of unfolding, re-presenting the grounds as the absented presence of Black womanhood from which we can imagine the world and more humanly workable geographies.⁴ Lurch's tesseract sculpts the demonic through manipulating lines into the space of a new dimension. Lurch contemplates the fourth-dimensional new image of the Black subject as human and visible through different dimensions. Lurch created a tesseract through depicting a four dimensional hy cube that is never entirely visible wherein, "the tesseract acts as analogy for the black condition in its capacity to be every changing and ultimately unknowable"⁵ King offers that Lurch takes up the tesseract in order to figure ideas and forms in ways that words cannot replicate—thus we see the representation of an absented presence that McKittrick speaks of in the demonic through Lurch's material rendering of lines as portals as possibilities for alternative ways of being in relation with space. The form of *Revisiting Sycorax* is porous, holey, and in constant renegotiation with itself. King describes Lurch's practice in which they mold their own "version, or ensemble, of questions about the 'whereabouts' of Sycorax by interlacing air and wire in ways that perforate and displace the air to rearrange the space around and within it."⁶

Within my own meditations on star glyphing and relations between rock, fire, water, and air, the space of the tesseract activates these flows through, between, underneath, and above matter through languages of seepage, liquidity, falling—embodying the movements of landing into, towards, and falling into relation. *Revisiting Sycorax* is articulated as a gathering or meetings space of "spiderwebbed and netlike masses of strings of black and copper wire,"⁷ which, when I position my own ruminations of landing into relation with

Revisiting Sycorax, Lurch's brilliance offers multiple dimensionalities as form of thinking through landing. Atmospheric of molten lava, fire, and copper liquidity remind me of the expansivity of landing grammars, as in the shoal, as calling for more subaqueous, subterranean, celestial modes of relationality.

If we were to be in conversation with these more-than- / other-than-human gatherings of matter, what would they tell us about their errant, exilic movement patterns and what they experience with other forms of matter? What can they teach us about how we can gather in generative, desirous forms and shapes? Perhaps that if we were to become riparian zones we could fall into each other as an intowardness, holding each other's tensions and creating spaces for release—as edgeless forms of matter. *Revisiting Sycorax* can be viewed as holding space for multiple choreographies of suture, bringing light to a landing processual practice that leaves as imprint an otherwise map into the kinds of futures we yearn for. The sonic spaces between the layers and folds of wire creates the spaces for the forms of resurgent and decolonial listening⁸ inherent in the spaces of relational ethics where listening is potentiated as a relational action occurring not merely between listener and listened to, but between the layers of more than / other than human kinships such as rock, matter, and their designs—traces and folds as strata to help us to imagine alternative forms of gathering, or visiting.

Thus, the tesseract presents possibilities towards a form of kin listening in between rock matter. As a diasporic shapeshifting kin, I witness as rocks inspire to be comfortable in a space of unknowing, to be comfortable with matter as a way of being perceptive and open to unexpected/ wondrous forms and shapes that do not fit within predetermined spaces. Rather, like shoaling, we become the granules that gather us, shaping us into new and unpredictable rogue formations, thus facilitating a space wherein ongoing emergence of new imaginaries are possible.

The tesseract, and the middle spaces that it affords, become cavernous becomings—a falling into an elsewhere where expressions of falling or landing are possible through a language of leaning intowards without claiming. Witnessing the shoals in relationship with *Revisiting Sycorax*—aesthetics of Black geographical expression through the conversation between material formations and movements—has helped me conceptually orient towards Indigenous diasporic landing in more capacious ways—as an ethic, practice, and motivation for my work which includes making star quilts. As when I think with Dylan Robinson's ethics of relational and decolonial listening, alongside the tesseract as a shape or form to think with, I appreciate these forms which allow for us to “sess”⁹ In the novel, sessing is an orogene practice of wayfinding through an organ called Sessapinae used to explore the underneath. It is a way to feel one's way through rock strata to quell the shakes of earth's movements through the sessing markers underground, which are described thus: “small

blocks of marble with words etched into one surface. It takes a very fine degree of control to not only find the blocks but determine the words; it's like tasting a page of book."¹⁰ as generative modes of listening, sensing (spiralling, shifting, leaning) to visit from a diasporic positioning that acknowledges edges, and edgelessness, thereby shaping alternative movements through sensing space/place and landing intentionally.

Revisiting Sycorax asks us to consider the possibility that maybe our falling into place is messy, indeterminant and unpredictable. This work speaks deeply to me as an Indigenous person who has landed into place as a result of the Children's Aid Society's removal of Indigenous bodies from their home territories. Rock helps me to think about my own landings into space in a way I can live with—so that I can move alongside, while still madly critiquing forms of Indigenous removal and dispossession.

Dylan Robinson's provocations in *Hungry Listening* help me to situate landing as a process that contains purposeful agility/articulation of intention, through Indigenous mobility and proprioception as stimuli that are produced and perceived within a so-constitutive kinship resonate theory. If I were a gathering of matter/materiality, I would follow that slip, that wire, willfully and intentionally. I would visit along the way—other gatherings of matter as knots, shoals, ridges, edges. I also think about the dedication praxis, the ethical citational praxis of considering landing as a movement, as gesturing, sonic atmospherics of meteoric falls, landings within an atmospheric of wind, pressure, tension, and a release: an abandon (as in leaning into a slip).

King points out how Lurch's sculpture *Revisiting Sycorax* creates and crosses Black geographies, mimicking the unusual terrains of Black exilic thought and aesthetics. I am moved to think about this in relation to sounding practices as unusual sonic terrains. How might *Revisiting Sycorax* come into conversation with Caroline Monnet's *The Flow Between Hard Places*, a vertical concrete sculpture embodying the soundwave of the word *pasapkedjinawong* ("the river that passes between the rocks") in Anishinaabemowin, as shared by Elder Rose Wawatie-Beaudin.¹¹ This sculpture proposes another anti-monument whereby the undulating waves of the sculpture evoke water constantly in motion, time, and the transference of knowledges. This work engages dimensionality through the sonic assemblage of three. I appreciate Monnet's contributions to the discourse around monuments in relationship with King's. As Monnet suggests, "It's important for people to have different types of monuments In this case, the idea of using sound and materializing it into sculpture that can become a monument is interesting, as is representing water as a monument."¹²



Figure 1. "Star Blanket" (2022) by Karyn Recollet.

As material forms, star blankets (see Figure 1) center collage as a way of inciting a gathering, layering ideas, and creating new forms—multiverses—and a way of being and curating the worlds differently. King's writing attends to the complexities and ruptures that we need to activate as reparative gestures (or what Tanya Lukin Linklater calls recuperative gestures).¹³ King offers the space of the shoal as "simultaneously land and sea to fracture this notion that black diaspora studies is over determined by rootlessness, only metaphorized by water, and to disrupt the idea that Indigenous studies is solely rooted and fixed in imaginaries of land as territory."¹⁴ In other words, she critiques the overdetermination of Black = water, and Indigenous = land as the only possible relations. The shoal in King's work "creates a rupture and at the same time opens up analytical possibilities for thinking of Indigeneity as exceeding the symbol and analytic of land."¹⁵ Rather than perpetuating location as the only possible technology for Indigenous relations with lands, motion inspired land-based work infuses understandings of place with a future-oriented possibility. This opening, these middle spaces of possibility, require us to see, witness, and listen collage-like; to be open to multiversal layerings; to reanimate cyphers and circuitous motions as practices of space making.

As a multidimensional glyph, the star blanket functions in a similar way to the shoal as a landing device. Like the star blanket, as a technology of landing, the shoal produces an architectural terrain where the imprinting of the landing itself, much like the center point of

a star, illuminates an imprint of a falling, a gathering of granulations, articulations of fine falling into relation, and it is from here that we can begin the process of theorizing landing practices through tesseract-like gatherings of multitudinous realms, shaped by portals, between spaces, as sites of capacious landing, where song, glyph activates buildings, trees, and other forms of diasporic architectures. The kin choreosonics of suturing offers a landing practice of diaspora—part of landing processual practice of repair—such that is mirrored in Monnet’s and in Lurch’s stunning works that imprint processions of care. In each case, we are listening to the fall, the landing as a slowed down practice of encountering atmospherics as thoughts, concepts that shape and gather into formation something that is surprising, illuminative, secret. Like a spider being you are suturing in the landing. These tactile articulations of the fall are slow—producing transmissions perhaps, movement-based sonic attunements which gather us in particular ways.

As I enter into the atmospherics of Lurch’s work, I think about the many ways in which *Revisiting Sycorax* might be envisioned as a speculative cartography mapping sound territory, through thinking about the spiral as a landing technology to unbind static boundaries of settlement.¹⁶ Languages and concepts activate a wrapping around, an orbiting land in a spiral. The spiral, the intertwining of copper wire, becomes a way of gathering tension, a weaving form of offering invitations into conversation through the very act of landing into relation. The shoal offers a space of departure for the kinds of visioning that we have to articulate through movements, sonics, choreographies that begin at the knotted point—that began with the relation as a point of departure and a way into deeper relation through realizing that our bodies are the gravitational pulling force forming an atmospheric of care. Our articulations within and sourced from a point of friction remind me of the ways that rock’s porosity is a space-making project of re-memory, an archive of livingness that activates something. The shoal incites me to think about the livingness of memory in rock, the possibilities of indeterminant glitches within the porosity—the vesicles, as Joseph Pierce reminds me to think about. This indeterminant falling space—where we fall into relation as spirals come to land in their fissures—include a creative potentiality for different forms of livingness to thrive. The spiral, as a formation of landing shaped by the air, creates the breath in bubbles that then gets solidified into form, becoming shoals—an interiority, a secret, a space to hide precious things.

Moving/Wiggling a Line

Lurch’s ritual of twisting and wiggling points, lines, and planes in a way moves close to Wynter’s conception of the demonic and its unpredictability and openness. Lurch scrunches, stretches, and disfigures normative notions of time, dimensionality, and space.

–Tiffany Lethabo King¹⁷

In describing a conversation with the material forms brought together in his sculptural piece *Édifice*,¹⁸ Michael Belmore offers that the ways that rocks experience time and space are quite different than ours."¹⁹ Further,

These collections of stones have moved and settled on the land paralleling histories of migration, displacement, erasure, and the resilient ties of communities that connect across space. Carved and lined with copper, they seemingly radiate heat—as the years pass, the glow of the copper fades and turns green, the stones settle and take their place amongst those who have travelled before them.²⁰

Likewise, engaging the materiality of the granular sediments that shape them, shoals embody and become space is of malleability, edges, and edgelessness. To render impossible the very thinking behind the imposition of boundaries as legitimizers of control and violence, Lurch's careful, intentional praxis of *moving a line* touches and communes with *Édifice's* edginess that spills over into copper that then seeps into rock. These are reminders of the falling into of errant geographies whose spillage refuses nation-state conquest. The star blanket came about through the delicate practice of moving a line, and holding tensions of the lines themselves, more akin to the malleability and the struggle to line things up, reflecting the impossible task of navigating conquest terrains.

In my own making practice, the delicate patterning of the star quilt as a way of landing refused this perfect, linear, and one-dimensional landedness as we are encouraged to perform. In fact, what I learned from star quilting as a practice is that moving a line (lining up) requires us to pay attention instead to the layers of strata above, below, tentacularly—in an ongoing commitment towards centering alignments, fabric chasing fabric, covering up frayed edges, and suturing the tesseract. In this way the forms of the shapes of the gatherings that we perform/ activate, and invite others into, are more about the doing of the falling into—a collaborative movement practice that is reflected in Charmaine Lurch's wire meeting wire, intertwining, fusing to create fulcrums. Landing becomes a purposeful agility, the articulation of attention as a sensing of the body during a fall; a holding of tension and release (inspired by Ashon Crawley's "Otherwise Movements").²¹ A landing through star blanket technology, Belmore's *Edifice*, and Lurch's sculptural forms can make possible a refusal of the landedness of land / a reminder that our landing genealogies are (much like the atmospheric residue left in the wake of a meteorite, or noticeable genealogies of flight) deeply sutured, sedimented in our land relations. Landings are land relations, and landback is also an exploration of landings, of suture, and of repair of landings. We are being called into this indeterminate space of flux and change (as in the shoal) to explore our own edgelessness as a space of reparative gestures of leaning into one another.

Response from Tiffany Lethabo King

Dear Karyn,

Your story of falling and landing as a diasporic Cree woman made me return to Charmaine Lurch's extraordinary sculptural figure of Sycorax to consider her exilic dance once more. I had not imagined the possibility of falling or "choreographies of falling" when I first encountered her. The lines beneath Sycorax's feet produce a space in flux as well. It is hard to tell whether the lines render the space land, water, or both, but the space is surely alive under her feet. Karyn, your choreographies at the level of language that move not only back and forth between verb and gerund but between aesthetic practices (this time Lurch, Monnet, Belmore, and your own sky quilting) is what sets the "expansivity of landing grammar" in motion. In your lines that seek and find flight you write,

"The tesseract, and the middle spaces that it affords, become cavernous becomings—a falling into an elsewhere where expressions of fallings, or landing are possible through a language of leaning intowards without claiming. Witnessing the shoals in relationship with Revisiting Sycorax—aesthetics of Black geographical expression through the conversation between material formations and movements—has helped me conceptually orient towards Indigenous diasporic landing in more capacious ways—as an ethic, practice, and motivation for my work which includes making star quilts."

Above you write of our fallings and landings as a site of Indigenous and Black becoming. Falling, and "leaning intowards" one another without claims is another kind of relation.

As we consider that falling (and landing) are "messy, indeterminant and unpredictable" we also interrupt static relations to land. As you write sky quilt glyphs and sutures with Lurch, Monnet, and Belmore, you also enact an un-suturing or refusal of the "landedness of land." Your choreographies, suturing, and quilting, across aesthetic meditations on landing, take me back to the dry riverbed. The riverbed did not offer me a stable understanding of it as a predictable stratum from which I could stand adroit and dictate my own path. It was a space of possible fallings/fellings that required me to reorient my body-mind-land equilibrium. The body must both remember old choreographies and make new ones to sustain itself. The faller embraces a whole host of capacities, skills, grammars, and proprioception (against normative notions of ability) with a demanded urgency.

You write that, "Landings are land relations, and land back is also an exploration of landings, of suture, and of repair of landings. We are being called into this indeterminate space of flux and change (as in the shoal) to explore our own edgelessness as a space of reparative gestures of leaning into one another." Falling is a space of vulnerability that

requires a new relationship to land/ing. Landing is always a relation, and we must not forget who we became and with whom we became to survive the fall.

I long to see you (falling-landing) beyond zoom world, friend.

Na:te:dil We Are Going Home: A Meditation on Tiffany King's *The Black Shoals*

by Stephanie Lumsden

Reading *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* is like hearing the waves of the ocean, smelling its brine, and feeling the coarseness of the sand on the bottoms of my feet. It is a sensuous experience textured by Tiffany Lethabo King's unique ability to draw the reader into the world of poetics and possibilities that emerge from the Black shoals. Shoals, as King explains, are geological formations that form a barrier between the land and ocean creating a dynamic, unknowable, and life generating space.²² King invites us to blur the presumed boundaries between Black and Native studies (as well as experiences and people) and embrace each other. She encourages us to avoid the pitfalls of surrendering our visions of the future to white modes of thought that further entrench ongoing conquest and foreclose on what could and will be instead. Importantly, she reminds the reader that the projects of Black abolition and Native decolonization circumvent liberal humanism and offer alternative articulations of freedom.²³ If freedom is a place, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore has famously said, then perhaps this is how we get there.²⁴

As a methodological practice and approach, the shoal functions as a process and space where boundaries and binaries constructed between sea and land, Black and Native, aesthetics and theory, and human and nonhuman are blurred.

—Tiffany Lethabo King²⁵

There are several key theoretical interventions in King's book but there are two in particular that I look forward to utilizing in my own writing. The first is her critique of white settler colonial studies. King argues that the discourse of settlers/settlement over-emphasizes the significance of white settler relationships to land and disavows the violence of ongoing genocide by turning away from the knowledge that "settlers also become conquistadors/(humans) through Native genocide and Black dehumanization."²⁶ White settler colonial studies is fundamentally limited by its impulse to rescue the white liberal human subject and therefore should not be the intellectual genealogy from which we most heavily draw. However, the analytical frame of conquest allows us to theorize conquistador humanism as a process by which white subjects *become* through Black and Indigenous

death.²⁷ Black vernaculars of conquest, King asserts, hold space for discussions of genocide and slavery without committing intellectual and erotic energies to recuperating the project of white liberal humanism.²⁸ Beyond being a more generative theoretical frame, conquest is a grammar that is capacious enough for Black and Indigenous healing, belonging, and world-making.

Home increasingly had to do with how those of us in the circle amid the rising smoke make peace with one another again and again.

—Tiffany Lethabo King²⁹

While guiding the reader through her engagement with artist Charmaine Lurch's sculpture "Revisiting Sycorax" in the *The Black Shoals'* last chapter, King offers a beautiful rumination on Black exile and the meaning of home. Reading it, I was transported through time and space from Toronto, to the Caribbean, and finally to my own homeland of Natinixw, the Hoopa Valley. Among Hupa people the valley is often referred to as "our home forever," and I admit I had taken that for granted until reading King's work. Home, she theorizes, is not a static confine, but a set of ethical relationships that are placemaking/homemaking.³⁰ So when we say "our home forever" perhaps we do not just mean that the land is ours (which is most certainly true), we may also mean that as long as there are human and nonhumans to make ethical relations with, we will have a home. Home is not a border, it's a call for more relatives.

In a recent essay, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson states that for Indigenous peoples, generative refusal is a rejection of the settler colonial state coupled with the (re)generation of new ways of building a livable life with each other.³¹ Importantly, she goes on to say that these alternative ways of building life are guided by an Indigenous ethic of care and responsibility that transcends the imposed imperial and colonial borders of the nation-state; these are the ethics of internationalism.³² For Simpson as with King, revolutionary movements such as the movement for Black lives are capacious enough for many iterations of liberation, contemporaneous sovereignties, and relations so long as they are based in an ethics of care and responsibility. Simpson articulates Indigenous epistemologies by invoking art, kinship, play, love, and political solidarity in a way that eschews a single vision of freedom and invites others to make a home alongside her on her ancestral homeland. I hear echoes of *The Black Shoals* in her piece.

The longing for home or an "elsewhere" that has animated the desire of so many Black diasporic subjects in exile who seek reprieve from white supremacist violence is perhaps answered by Simpson's invitation to make ethical relationships with one another and the land. Hers is an invitation to collectively participate in finding freedom, belonging, and home through relationships based on an ethic of reciprocity and care. By refusing to isolate Native political struggles for decolonization and liberation from the freedom struggles of

Black diasporic subjects and others, Simpson demonstrates how Indigenous and Black peoples can nourish each other's freedom dreams. I am bringing Simpson into my discussion of *The Black Shoals* because I want to highlight the ways that Native/Indigenous studies scholars and communities are poised to respond to the questions that King poses in her work. Too often, the political struggles and aspirations of Black and Native peoples are depicted as though they are at odds, as if there is not enough freedom for all of us. Simpson, with whom King is in discussion in her text, helps to widen the opening to the Black and Native futures created by *The Black Shoals*. This opening is generative for my thinking about the relationship between abolition and decolonization.

The Black Shoals offers an urgently needed intervention in the fields of Black and Native studies. Throughout the text, King reveals the violence of conquistador humanism, interrupts white settler colonial studies' presumed ownership of radical Black and Native futurities, and dissolves the imagined borders between the studies of slavery and genocide by deploying the theoretical framework of conquest. I am grateful to have this stunning work to return to as I think and feel my way through my own project about Black abolition and Native decolonization. *The Black Shoals* should be read as an invitation for Black and Native communities (scholarly and otherwise) to extend kinship to one another, to delight in the erotic and generative space of the Black shoals, and to dream dreams of what abolition and decolonization will be. Freedom is indeed a place, and we will get there by making a home with each other.

Response from Tiffany Lethabo King

Dear Stephanie,

I remember meeting you in 2018 at UCLA. We were a part of a working group on racial violence. I recall presenting a project on the violent processes of settler laborers that labored across Black and Indigenous femme bodies. Many of us were attending to gendered anti-Indigenous and anti-Black violence in our work. Some of us mined the archives of historical violence that made Black and Indigenous people specimens, that justified holding our bones in museum basements, and that reduced us to mere matter. I specifically remember your caution to participants—myself, and another—about our use of the “S” and “N” words as we tried in earnest to hold each other's painful histories. I appreciate the intervention. Whom can hold and speak my terror and pain depends upon their relationship with me.

The language that we invent, craft, and use to recognize each other reflects the kinds of relationships we have with another. You write about about Leanne Betasomasake Simpson's desire for Indigenous and Black people to “nourish each other's freedom

dreams." I too often turn to Simpson to articulate this Black and Indigenous poetics of freedom. In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson expresses a deep "ethical obligation[s]" structured by her desire, and intention to shape radical resurgence in relationship to the Black Radical tradition.³³ Simpson is not only invested in revolutionary change, but she is specifically interested in and committed to moving toward that horizon in relationship with Black people. She states that within "Nishnaabewin, I have ethical obligations to the Black community."³⁴ Like, Simpson, I also believe that Black people and Indigenous people have and articulate through language (and extra-discursively) specific obligations to and dreams for one another.

In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson moved toward the shared language and enactments of flight and fugitivity. In *The Black Shoals*, I thought through conquest. As you aptly argue, I did intend to "interrupt[s] white settler colonial studies' presumed ownership of radical Black and Native futurities," and I wanted to "dissolve[s] the imagined borders between the studies of slavery and genocide by deploying the theoretical framework of conquest." Rather than dismiss "white settler colonial studies" as a discourse entirely, I chose the grammar of conquest to talk about a specific and shared history of surviving specific kinds of violent bloodletting that attempted to ungender, unmatter,³⁵ and annihilate Black and Indigenous people in the Americas. Surviving these particular kinds of violence produces distinct kinds of capacities, survival strategies, practices of joy, and of course, language(s). Not one language, but many. Again, I would not argue that the language is exclusive; it is just particular to the unique relationship and practice that is Black and Indigenous futurity. It is as specific as is the notion of home. You write that, "Among the Hupa people the valley is often referred to as "our home forever." You clarify and nuance this Hupa articulation of the valley as our home forever by offering that you "do not just mean that the land is ours (which is mostly true), we may also mean that as long as there are human and nonhumans to make ethical relations with, we will have a home. Home is not a border, it's a call for more relatives." Home means a very specific thing to the Hupa who are forever in a process of making more relatives. And often our Black and Indigenous relatives have precise names and special roles as kin.

Thank you for searching for language with me.

"There are New Suns": The Shoal as Abolitionist and Decolonial DreamSpace

by Stephanie Latty

As a space in and from which we may reach for one another in ways that are in alignment with our collective desires and longings for liberation, the shoal is a geography that moves us toward new ways of being in relation with one another. The shoal, as an analytic, offers us a chance to pause in a liminal space of possibility and to consider how we might ask a different set of questions and create a different set of stories about our social world. The shoal, neither land nor sea, shifts and morphs and changes, dreamlike—and as Tiffany Lethabo King has put it—evading capture.³⁶

Engaging with *The Black Shoals* has led me to linger on dreaming, liminality, potential, and possibility as a home for Black and Indigenous relational theorization and liberatory praxis. In her text, King opens not only theoretical terrain but also creates a place of livingness—by this I mean a place in which we may *live*—for those of us compelled to think through these relational possibilities.³⁷ The shoal is a geography of radical openness where Black and Indigenous people can imagine and cocreate futures unmoored from the binaries that tether us to liberal humanness.

Geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes that abolition is a place-making practice which “starts from the homely premise that freedom is a place.”³⁸ She goes on, “the undoing of bondage—abolition—is quite literally to change places” and to destroy geographies of carcerality.³⁹ Gilmore emphasizes that abolition is a practice of doing, building, and presencing that requires a disassembly of existing structures of domination and involves building the world anew. Gilmore’s assertions also emphasize the importance of place and land in our considerations of abolition. In conversation with Gilmore, Dylan Rodriguez writes that “abolition is a dream toward futurity vested in insurgent, counter-civilizational histories—genealogies of collective genius that perform liberation under conditions of duress.”⁴⁰ Taken together, an abolitionist vision means not only engaging in active refusal of the carceral, but of dreaming up and building the world(s) otherwise.

The shoal is a site through which we may begin or continue our abolitionist and decolonial dream practice. I am reminded here of a scene in Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, which begins with an account of the recurring dream of Lauren Olamina, the protagonist of the story. In the dream, Olamina is levitating in a burning house. Before her, she sees a doorway that is emanating a cool glowing light. She floats her body towards it “as though to slide on the air drifting a few feet above the floor, caught between terror and joy.”⁴¹ She continues levitating but begins to drift away from the door and toward the fire, only partially in control of her movements. As the flames spread and grow around her, the dream shifts to a dreamscape in which Olamina is hanging up laundry to dry with her stepmother. Looking up at a starry sky streaked by the Milky Way, her stepmother reminisces about a time when the city lights blazed so brightly that they drowned out the stars. As Olamina gazes up into the night sky, identifying some constellations and imagining the names of

others, she comes to the conclusion that she would rather have the stars over the city lights. Over the years since I first read *Parable*, I have remembered this doorway in Olamina's recurring dream and imagined it as a kind of liminal dreamspace of open possibility—one that offers us the opportunity to divest from the capitalistic drive of urgency and productivity, and one that can allow us to slow. That is, after all, part of what a shoal does. It slows.

As we move through the story, the reader sees the way that Olamina imagines herself and her community in the future. She plans ahead and visions herself and those she cares surviving in a world that is unsurvivable, murderous, and unrelenting in its violence. Olamina has a condition called hyper-empathy syndrome, meaning she can feel the pain and pleasure of others as if it were her own. When they bleed, she bleeds. The future for Olamina seems grim in a bleak and pain-filled world. However, what is clear is that her liberation is bound to the liberation of others. As a liminal space between sea and land, the shoal as an analytic demands that we consider Black life and Indigenous life as distinct yet inseparable in a way that explodes Cartesian binaries. King asks readers to consider Black and Indigenous life in their co-constitutive complexity and simultaneity.

Robin Kelley writes "Call me utopian, but I inherited my mother's belief that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds us."⁴² In *Parable of the Sower*, Olamina continues to plan for the future she sees coming. Along the way, Olamina creates a belief system called Earthseed and through her journal entries and the verses that she creates, writes herself into the future. She imagines Earthseed "taking root in the stars."⁴³ We might think of her Earthseed verses as a kind of shoal—a space to imagine, presence, and actively create a future together otherwise.

In our present moment of multiple and overlapping crises, it is more important than ever that Black and Indigenous scholars engage in ceremonies of dreaming up how we might create futures together that are vibrant with livingness. This is what *The Black Shoals* makes possible—new worlds, new relationalities, and new suns "forged off the shoreline in the space of the shoal."⁴⁴

Response from Tiffany Lethabo King

Dear Stephanie (Latty),

I am honored that you were inspired to think with Octavia Butler and Ruth Wilson Gilmore as you meditated on my book. I think about ends and beginnings of worlds when I think of Butler and Gilmore as thinkers and dreamers. The ways that their work describes and creates scenes of "freedom as a place," is palpable. It is why so many organizers, artists,

teachers, and way makers travel with Butler and Wilson's dreamscapes. I thought about the last time that I turned to Butler's *Parable of the Sower* for something. I am always returning to it as it has functioned as an actual guide for living in the twenty-first century.

When I returned to it again, it was the fall of 2020. I was teaching Black Feminist Thought during the first fall semester of the COVID-19 pandemic and after many of my students had just left Atlanta's burning streets following George Floyd's murder. So many of my students wanted—*needed*—to talk about violence. They had been talking about abolition for years, but wanted to get their heads (and hearts) around what role violence—and their use of it—played in an abolitionist horizon. I turned again to *Parable of the Sower* to open up a conversation with my students about Lauren Olamina's ethics of violence. Lauren made peace with and used violence strategically for the immediate survival of her community and the long-term vision of Earth Seed.

We talked about Lauren Olamina's relationship to violence. We also talked about her power and disability (hyper-empathy syndrome). However, this time we were able to talk about violence and disability together in the context of abolitionist and decolonial struggle. Lauren Olamina has a unique relationship to violence as a person with hyper-empathy who must at once deploy and temper violence to survive. I appreciate your articulation of her vulnerability as "she can feel the pain and pleasure of others as if it were her own. When they bleed, she bleeds." And more importantly, "that her liberation is bound to the liberation of others." Lauren Olamina's hyper empathy makes her a figure of immense capacity. Her capacity for care and potential to wield violence cannot be separated in the context in which she lives. As a Black femme traveler through the end of one world and the beginning of another, destruction and creation are tethered. The capacity to wield violence (force for some) is a very difficult topic to broach in the academic abolitionist and decolonial classroom.

Lauren Olamina became an apt model for students whose attentions turned toward Minneapolis (a city much like Toronto), where Black abolitionist and Indigenous decolonial imaginaries were shaping discussions about revolution and reanimating radical traditions for this generation. As you have written, "In our present moment of multiple and overlapping crises, it is more important than ever that Black and Indigenous scholars engage in ceremonies of dreaming up how we might create futures together that are vibrant with livingness." Butler and other Black and Indigenous speculative fiction writers and world builders (such as N. K. Jemisin and Cherie Dimaline) rarely flinch from the necessity of violence and the unique ethical dilemmas it presents as they imagine more livable worlds. While I am not attempting to deliberate on the use violence by abolitionists, I am grateful for Butler's Black (feminist) radical imaginary in the *Parable* series that broaches the topic in a way that academics often cannot or will not. For many of my

students, *Parable of the Sower*, and Lauren Olamina's relationship to care, violence, and vulnerability felt like one of the only ethical texts that they read in fall of 2020.

I love the way you hold and read the text as well. I look forward to talking about our experiences sharing it with our Black and Indigenous students.

The Measure Between Self and Bad Poetry

by Megan Scribe

I fell in love in 2007 and bad poetry ensued.

*There is sediment residing inside of me.*⁴⁵

At eighteen years old, these were the words I had to describe the experience of allowing myself to be undone and reconfigured by another. When I could not bring myself to confess my feelings, somehow it seemed more appropriate to write a cringe-inducing love poem, submit it for publication in the school newspaper, and hand her a copy hot off the press.

After reading Tiffany Lethabo King's *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, I felt compelled to salvage this work from the sentimental depths.⁴⁶ What does a schoolgirl crush have to do with interdisciplinary studies? Well, everything actually. Guided by the force of shoals, King considers the theoretical and methodological possibilities that might open up if Black and Indigenous studies were to collide in her debut book.

A shoal is a geological formation and location that can be defined as a place where the water is of little depth.⁴⁷ Shoals are frequently described as sandbanks, bars, or coral reefs. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century, King reveals, ship captains and crew regarded shoals with trepidation as they lacked the scientific knowledge and navigational equipment required to anticipate and avoid the geological formations. Even with the advancement of navigational technology, shoals remain unpredictable and somewhat paradoxical in nature. While the accumulation of sand, rocks, and other matter give these formations density and dimension, the shoal "exceeds full knowability/mappability."⁴⁸ A shoal is formidable in its ability to sink a ship and, yet, these formations are changeable and remain in a constant state of transformation.

King extends this discussion on shoals to Black thought. Just as shoals represent the dissolution of boundaries between land and water, the transformation of geographic terrain, and the friction of myriad forces, *The Black Shoals* represents an analytical site that compels Black and Indigenous scholars to pause. She asks: how might the theoretical and

methodological topography of Black and Indigenous studies be transformed by this meeting place?

*These divine particles which manifest
all that is conscious and hopeful,
present in my being.*

Black and Indigenous encounters are not new. As King put it elsewhere, "Certainly Black people have crossed the minds of Native scholars and Native life has interested the Black scholar."⁴⁹ There are many examples of collaboration and coalition between Black and Indigenous peoples within academia and activism across history. Although both Black and Indigenous peoples have borne the brunt of imperial domination, often by the same oppressors, efforts to maintain common ground have been fraught with disagreement and disappointment. In her dissertation, King has contemplated the "(im)possibility of a coalition between Black and Native Women."⁵⁰ Clearly there is mutual intrigue; however, fugitive flirtation and sustained commitment are two things entirely.

Taking *The Black Shoals* as the meeting place where boundaries are more readily dissolved, King urges Black and Indigenous studies scholars to consider the productive potential of erotic chaos in favor of coalition-building in the fourth chapter. In contemplating myriad relational possibilities, "Our Cherokee Uncles: Black and Native Erotics" serves as my starting point for imagining and working towards mutually fulfilling encounters between Black and Indigenous folks. In this chapter, King argues, "discourses of coalition often foreclose conversations about sex, erotics, and Black and Indigenous futures."⁵¹ Informed by Audre Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic*, King invites Black and Indigenous scholars to explore the "measure between the beginnings of the sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings."⁵² Within this interstitial space, the dissolution of self through the absolute embodiment of shared ecstasy, suffering, joy, and chaos poses the potential to radically transform selfhood and nationhood. An important caveat, however, is that in order to experience the transformative power of erotic chaos, one must venture into the unknown, become undone, and refashioned.

*You are the current that runs through the river,
Disrupting and uniting the sand and water,
and inspiration swells within me.*

King is as pragmatic as she is poetic. When she states that decolonization requires plunging into the unknown depths of erotic chaos, she means it. This imperative is not naively issued by romanticism, but rather from the painfully acquired wisdom and experience of generational conflict, mutual betrayal, and persistent friction. To hold and

make space for the suffering of another, as erotic chaos necessitates, has always come with the fear of losing oneself for another.

When I first encountered King's scholarship in 2015, I was thinking deeply through Eve Tuck, Mistinguette Smith, Allison M. Guess, Tavia Benjamin, and Brian K. Jones' collaborative work on Black relationships to land. I was particularly struck by their experiences of collaboration. They elaborate, "contingent collaboration points to the ways that thresholds are not simply places of crossing from one state to another: They are places that demand pause to mark that passage . . . We had to engage these thresholds from different directions and widely different experiences."⁵³

Reading these two works with apparently drastic views on boundaries alongside one another allowed me to interpret erotic chaos with greater nuance and depth. Erotic chaos is not simply about collapsing difference for the sake of sameness. It is a commitment to generative tension and friction of difference. As King eloquently puts it, "the shared drum skin that beats out a new dance and the praising and calling forth of shared gods offer some of the most poignant moments, utterances, knots, kinetics, gestures, and modes of thinking about how the relations of conquest bring Black and Indigenous life into each other's folds."⁵⁴

When I shared the publication with my crush, I recall receiving some benign encouragement. While I was somewhat disappointed that my poem did not elicit the response I had initially (feared? desired?) anticipated, today I appreciate the work as a record earnestly attempting to describe the dissolution of the self into one's strongest feelings. In revisiting this work alongside King's *The Black Shoals*, I am reminded of both the thrill and inherent risk in knowing another. King does not promise that we will never make mistakes, hurt each other, or write bad poetry. She does, however, offer guidance for navigating these encounters with care while envisioning the generative possibilities of these intimate and interdisciplinary encounters.

Response from Tiffany Lethabo King

Dear Megan,

I love the way you take risks. When we talked on the phone last fall, you seemed like a practiced risk taker. And I am not surprised by your brazen attempt at 18 years old to share bad poetry with your schoolgirl crush.

I keep returning to our conversation about the possibility of our friendship and movement toward Black and Indigenous feminist relations as colleagues. That conversation, on a cold

fall night, has given us a ground of relation. At that time, there was a lot of risky territory to cross for us to have a place to land and fall (Recollect) to forge a connection.

At the time, I had not had a public conversation about my relationship with Andrea Smith. While I often talk to people about it, I do not provide statements, I do not give interviews, and I have not published about it (until now). Native and Indigenous feminists who I have a relationship with and who have been impacted by Andrea Smith's deception have shaped my response. I told you that I no longer have a relationship with Smith. We talked about my pain, your pain, other people's pain.

"The thrill and inherent risk in knowing another...we are not promised that...we will never make mistakes, hurt each other, or write bad poetry."

You were bold and deliberate about the potential of entering this space of "erotic chaos" with me. Lorde's gift, my words, your actions.

"Erotic chaos is not simply about collapsing difference for the sake of sameness. It is a commitment to generative tension and friction of difference."

I told you about my longing to have relationships with Indigenous feminists that are unmediated by relations of conquest. At so many turns, this desire is interrupted. At times it feels like a fantasy, or the immature wishes of a child. All relationships are mediated by their contexts. I have been reminded of this time and time again. The settler colonial bullshit will always get in the way. However, the way you attend to Lorde and encourage me to return to Lorde's Black feminist erotics at the scale of "tension" and "friction" remind me of something important.

Worthwhile friendship is in "the doing" which will inevitably produce tension and friction.

The doing of friendship is a risk. The risk mitigating impulse of the academy is organized to impede the brazenness of Indigenous and Black feminist relations. While we might have met in the academy's meeting rooms or hallways, at the conference, or in the pages of a special issue, the offshore risks we take on a fall night on the phone is "the doing" that matters. Being humbled by the scales at which friendship happens is a chaotic and beautiful thing. It is the risky friendships that I hope remain after "the Black and Indigenous Studies turn" and all its anthologies, syllabi, grants, and centers have crested and receded.

I'd rather have a phone call that we fit in on a cold fall night.

Be/stay well.

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